Poems from the Polka-Dot Apocalypse

By J. Martin Strangeweather

POEMS FROM THE POLKA-DOT APOCALYPSE

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for all the ghosts who still hunger

Table of Contents

Tears of Osiris: A Recipe for Enlightenment **7**
Commencement Speech **10**
Legacy **11**
Everyman the Liar **14**
Truth **16**
Hamster Wheel **18**
Typical Day 2020 **20**
as good a reason as any for compassion **21**
Too Much Butter, Not Enough Bread **23**
Twelve-Step Program **24**
Domestic Warfare **26**
The Dampkring, Amsterdam **27**
The Grey Area, Amsterdam **28**
The Bushdoctor, Amsterdam **29**
Building a Better Bomb **30**
The Limit **31**
It Can't Happen Here **32**
Igneous Prophet **33**
A Poem for the Midnight Hour **34**
Strange Weather **35**
Strangeweather **36**

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Tears of Osiris: A Recipe for Enlightenment

Take one fundamental thread of Creation and stretch it across eternity, laying out the tripwire. Then wait patiently. It might take an infinity or two, but something will eventually come along and spring the mechanism, triggering the formation of a universe. Wondering who or what trips the wire is a fool's game. In some form or another, the answer always ends up being you. You're the one who's to blame for this mess, and forgetfulness is no excuse for leniency.

Allow the newly formed universe a fraction of a second to cool, then strain the leftover matter from the antimatter, regulating gravity. Adjust the frequency setting until you find a stable quantum of electromagnetic action. Settings may vary from universe to universe. After stabilizing the cosmological substratum, calibrate the energy distribution matrix to $E = mc^2$ and set the subatomic particles aside for approximately five hundred million years, allowing the mixture enough time to congeal into stars and galaxies. Once the first batch of stars begins to go supernova, stir in the remaining elements and let the universe simmer for an additional ten billion years, occasionally checking for signs of life. Remember, in

order to destroy your enemies, you must first create them. When programming rudimentary biological algorithms, it's important not to confuse DNA codes with RNA codes. Also, during the early phase of biospheric construction, be sure not to mistake the greenish blue algae button for the bluish green mold button, or the violet wire for the ultraviolet wire. Try not to get your wires crossed in general.

The initial development of life requires infernal conditions. You were born from seas of magma and rivers of hellfire, cataclysmic earthquakes, poisonous sulfuric clouds. Once the earliest multicellular lifeforms take shape, soak the biosphere in primal fear for two to three billion years. Evolution may vary from biosphere to biosphere. At the first sign of civilization, pour in a liberal dose of greed and sprinkle with shame. Wait approximately ten thousand years for modernity to occur, then massacre eleven million Native Americans, exterminate six million Jews, execute two million Cambodians, butcher one million Armenians, slaughter eight hundred thousand Rwandans, eradicate seven hundred thousand Australian aborigines, and drop two atomic bombs that wipe out two hundred thousand Japanese civilians. Intentionally starve

fifteen million Hindus, three million North Koreans, and one million Tibetans. Enslave three million Africans in the name of *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness* knowing full well that *all men are created equal*.

Collect the blood and tears resulting from these atrocities and use the accursed liquid to marinate humanity's collective unconscious for seven to ten generations, until irreparable psychogenetic damage occurs, transforming every thought, every utterance, and every perception into something monstrous, manufacturing a zombified world of radioactive oceans under X-ray skies, everything you touch… contaminated… with tiny invisible monsters. Increase the level of dishonesty to a billion lies per second and check frequently for mass extinction while chanting, "The fragrant lotus only grows from the muck of the swamp," and praying for all the sour grapes to rot into heady wine.

Commencement Speech

Maybe we should strive to be average.

No pressure to excel or shine brighter than
your neighbors, coworkers, and competitors.

No pressure to be faster, more efficient.

No desperation to be wealthy, wealthier,
wealthie$$$t.

To be okay with yourself and where you are
instead of always feeling like you're behind.

To clock out at five and spend the rest of the day
not caring.

To abide rather than win.

legacy

the interviewer asked
what do you want your legacy to be

i came from language
and to language
i shall return

what more
could i
should i
possibly expect

what legacy have i inherited from my ancestors
from *homo erectus*
i inherited the ability to walk upright
from *homo ergaster*
i inherited the knowledge of taming fire

what sort of collective legacy
will our current incarnation
hand down to future generations
a million years from now
or even a mere ten thousand

many can't imagine how the human race
is going to survive the next one hundred

put simply
i hope to give back more than i have taken
but i'm worried this is impossible
without a radical shift
in my consumer behavior

wouldn't it be nice
if after my eventual assassination
someone erected a statue in my honor
not too tall
ten feet would suffice
but the statue should be a robot
or golem of some sort
the automaton would lumber around the city
fixing potholes and rescuing cats stuck in trees
perhaps the automaton would start a book club

or maybe the mayor could erect
a hundred-foot-tall statue of me
carved entirely out of soap
my legacy would melt at the first real downpour
cleansing the streets

delicate bubbles rising to the heavens
for a passing child's delight

in the untamable
unnamable
future
i merely wish
as most folks do
for history's severe lens
to cast me in a brighter light
than the shadows with which i associate myself

Everyman the Liar

Evil has the power
To do what others will not.
Goodness seeks safety
In transparent numbers.

Peaceful protests
And armchair activism
Have no effect
On those without conscience.

Do you want to fix the problem
Or punish the wrongdoers?
Rarely are the two synonymous.

Do you stalk
Everyone you meet
Online?

If you want to make the world a better place,
Remember to start with yourself.
I think Gandhi said that,
Or maybe it was Michael Jackson.

Behind every innovative genius who died penniless
Is a shortsighted gatekeeper who did not understand,
Would not get past their own pettiness,
Could not see beyond their own vanity.

Everyone knows the difference
Between right and wrong
Until their job or reputation is at risk.
All of our evils boil down to greed and pride.

Which is more important—
Justice, or keeping the peace?
Rarely are the two synonymous.

The human race will eventually become extinct
Because some of us never learned
To play nice.

Truth

I started a new job
Teaching kids art
Because my old job
Of saving the world
Doesn't pay much
Except in the currency of pain
Which becomes its own sort of wealth
To those who know how to exchange it

On my first day of work
I had to bury my art colony's
Beloved black cat
Because the landlord's cheap
Under-the-table maintenance guy
Kicked it in the face
Simply for being in the way

Different people in the art colony
Had different names for the beloved black cat
But a few of us called her Shadow
Shadow went into a coma
The vet said nothing could be done
But at least she wasn't in any pain
That anyone could see

The art colony
Took care of her round-the-clock
Dripping water on her tongue with an eyedropper
Petting her, telling her she’s a good kitty
Until our Shadow gently transitioned
Into the night's darkest hour

After burying our Shadow the next morning
I headed off to teach the next generation
About the value of art

Hamster Wheel

All the movies have already been watched.
All the amusement park rides
Have already been ridden.

The races have all been run.
The products have all been bought
And sold.

All the backs have been stabbed.
All the books have been written.
All the words . . . spoken.
All the thoughts . . . thought.

Hamster wheel,
Hamster wheel,
Remember a time before stars.
You are not these things.
You are nothing more than these things.
But what could this mean?

Your chair is made of eggshells,
Your bed is made of salted wounds,
Dresser full of Freudian slips

And secondhand dreams,
Uniforms fashioned from broken mirrors,
None of which reflect you,
While the clock whispers lies.

All the lives have already been lived.
All the gods have already been invented.

Hamster wheel galaxy
In the schizocratic linguiverse,
Spin me a web
To call home.

Typical Day 2020

Wear a facemask.
Wash your hands.
Do not touch anything.
Do not touch anyone.
Do not leave your house.
Do not trust the news.
Do not trust the police.
Do not trust the government.

Our neighbors are mirrors
Through which we catch distrustful glimpses
Of ourselves.

Stock up on toilet paper.
Wash your hands again, just to be safe.
Fill the bathtub with antibacterial gel.
Do not trust your own eyes and ears.
Seriously consider buying a firearm.

as good a reason as any for compassion

studies comparing brain scans of people
before and after they had COVID
reveal the loss of between
0.2% and 2.0% of brain matter

here's a scary thought
if COVID shrank everyone's brain
even just slightly…
everyone is slightly dumber

what sort of advice is there to give
a populace under such circumstances?

be careful what you argue over
fight over
hate over
hurt over
kill over

be patient with one another
be more forgiving
(the sagest wisdom no matter what era)

maybe I’m not thinking too clearly right now
maybe you’re not thinking too clearly yourself

how would you know?
how could you tell?

Too Much Butter, Not Enough Bread

I lived in a cave during the winter of 2019
Never once wandering into the daylight
Took a vow of silence that year
Memorized 10,000 Buddhist sutras
Quit eating carbohydrates
Swore off meat and dairy
Fasted for six months
Surviving on ten sunflower seeds
And a cupped handful of water per day
Until I almost died

For all the good it did
I should have volunteered to work
At the local soup kitchen

Twelve-Step Program

January: I'm starting to question the motives of my toothpaste. I wonder if it really has my best interests in mind.

February: I'm starting to question the motives of the FDA. I wonder if they really have my best interests in mind.

March: I'm starting to question the motives of my smartphone. I wonder if it really has my best interests in mind.

April: I'm starting to question the motives of my newsfeed. I wonder if it really has my best interests in mind.

May: I'm starting to question the motives of my neighbors. I wonder if they really have my best interests in mind.

June: I'm starting to question the motives of my friends and family. I wonder if they really have my best interests in mind.

July: I'm starting to question the motives of teachers, doctors, repairmen, and businesspeople in general. I wonder if they really have my best interests in mind.

August: I'm starting to question the motives of my supervisor. I wonder if he really has my best interests in mind.

September: I'm starting to question the motives of my religion. I wonder if it really has my best interests in mind.

October: I'm starting to question the motives of my president. I wonder if he really has my best interests in mind.

November: I'm starting to question the motives of my spouse. I wonder if they really have my best interests in mind.

December: I'm starting to question my own motives. I wonder if I really have my best interests in mind.

Domestic Warfare

My toaster is redefining its identity as an intersectionary site of cultural resistance, and my refrigerator is deconstructing the homogenized milk's heteronormative intertextual heuristics.

The lamp on my nightstand is preaching from a manifesto titled *Dehistoricizing the Epiphenomenal Qualia of Quantum Electrodynamic Sinusoidal Interpolations*, and my proletarian showerhead is furtively decentering the plutocratic bathtub's colonialized deontological codification.

It might look like I'm just slouching here in my boxer shorts on the passive aggressive couch, ham on rye with mayo and mustard in one hand, a remote control held defiantly in the other, watching a rerun of a remake on my widescreen, but what I'm really doing is fighting for survival. I'm fighting for my life.

The Dampkring, Amsterdam

Mouths filled with slogans, heads full of commercials, hearts overflowing with Hollywood—the American tourists are out on the prowl in the Red Light, including me, but I'm looking for something else. The truest answer transcends our ability to formulate its question. Everything's an illusion except for the way illusions work. I used to think the answer would come from within. But now it seems that within is formed entirely from without. From things outside of myself, if such a boundary even exists. My bucket of a self, a bucket of near-infinite volume, able to hold the sun, the moon, the stars, whatever I fill it with. All my experiences. All my guts. All my bullshit. All my selves. None of which are mine. None of which are enough. I'm missing something. Something I must have overlooked. Like, maybe everything.

The Grey Area, Amsterdam

At the moment, the Grey Area is packed. Being one of the smallest coffeeshops in Amsterdam, the Grey Area is almost always packed, plus they've won a ton of Cannabis Cup Awards, so of course there's a line of patiently anxious pothead fanfare stretching out the door. The Grey Area is a liminal state of mind, a place of hazy indecision, and a tangle of legalities that amounts to a legal grab for cannabis revenues without the actual legalizing of cannabis. I'm not high enough to wait in this line, and if I *were* high enough to wait in this line, then I wouldn't need to wait in line to get high. Screw it, I'm heading over to The Bushdoctor.

The Bushdoctor, Amsterdam

This coffeeshop has surprisingly good coffee, not that anyone ever comes here for it. I'm stoned. Feeling comfortably dense, heavy, gelatinous. My mind, however, is soaring, tallying wrongs committed against me, flipping through the rolodex of life's disappointments, beating myself up trying to work out issues that I gave up on years ago. Attempting to solve myself. Cannabis does that to me sometimes, especially the sativas. It's past midnight, and the Russian kid working the smoke bar told me the place closes in ten minutes. I take one last puff. Some guy with bushy hair and a scuzzy beard is staring at me as I'm writing in my journal. He probably thinks I'm writing about him, which I am now, but I wasn't before he began acting paranoid, or maybe I'm the one acting paranoid. Stoners.

Building a Better Bomb

"Wake up, dear. It's time to go to school."
"Aw, I don't wanna."
"But you have to, dear. You're the teacher."

The words are dead. The sentences came out stillborn, no doubt about that. The only lively passages are the plagiarized ones. The teacher looks at the clock. It's only been ten minutes. He looks at the stack of essays. A disheveled tower of incompetence waiting to ruin his weekend, hundreds of pages scrawled with graffiti, tattooed with text. He looks at the students. Their bored boring faces remind him of how long he had to attend college just to babysit the future inmates of San Quentin. Babysitting body bags. Babysitting dust. He looks at the clock. It's only been two minutes since the last time he looked. He looks at the students. Their spaded hands thrust upward like fascist salutes, anxious to ask him a question he has no interest in answering. He looks at the clock. Its hands are refusing to move. He looks at the students. Their blooming pimples and budding sources of shame awkwardly remind him of all the rites of passage he missed out on while struggling to maintain a 3.3 GPA in high school. He looks at the clock. It's frowning 8:20 at him. He looks at the students, wondering if they can tell he has a hangover.

The Limit

The limit of my body is the limit of my mind.
The limit of my mind is the limit of my universe.
The limit of my universe is the limit of my language.
The limit of my language is the limit of my body.

It Can't Happen Here

It can't happen here.
It already has.

It can't happen to me.
It already has.

Looking down upon the world,
all the martyred children in heaven cry out,
"How could they have let this happen?"

"The same way they always do,"
says the Archangel Gabriel.
"It's a simple equation:
Vanity plus greed
multiplied by dishonesty
minus compassion
divided by the willful ignorance of the masses
equals tyrants."

Igneous Prophet

Today I met a man who only spoke in stones.

Pebbles dribbled from his craggy lips
With promises of boulders.

Despite my disbelief,
I will soon be crushed
Beneath his mountain of rubble.

A Poem for the Midnight Hour

It's only a poem
hastily written
before the demons creep back,
and I wish it were better,
stronger,
healthier,
wiser,
kinder,
more patient,
more forgiving.

I wish it could take all your pain
and turn it to inspiration.

I wish it could take all your fear
and turn it to hope.

But it's only a poem.
And I am just a poet
in a world of mad god-kings.

Strange Weather

Stranger things than true love have happened in America. Flightless animals have rained from the sky, usually amphibians. Frogs bombarded Kansas City in 1873 and Dubuque in 1882. A deluge of toads blanketed Minneapolis in 1901. Sacramento experienced a downpour of salamanders in 1870. Memphis witnessed a rainfall of black snakes in 1877. Tangles of worms drizzled over Jennings in 2007. Various types of fish showered Cambridge in 1828, Kershaw County in 1901, Marksville in 1947, and Norfolk in the year 2000. Certain fruits have also fallen from the heavens. Unripe peaches plummeted from branchless heights onto Shreveport in 1961, and a hailstorm of green apples pelted Coventry in 2011. Stranger still, cotton candy clouds sprinkled Lake County with sugar crystals twice in 1857.

Strangeweather

The cityscape is a hodgepodge of skyscrapers designed to look like wine bottles and martini glasses and nosebleed stilettos, all constructed from the recycled dreams of dead rock stars. Banana airplanes glide through the heavens on glittery feathered wings, and every Christmas Eve the pink cotton candy clouds rain psychedelic gumdrops.

Freshly gutted cherubs are displayed on meat hooks in the storefront windows along the sidewalk leading to my high-rise coffin at the intersection of Lincoln and Olympic Boulevards, otherwise known as the end of Route 66. I reside in a replica of the Statue of Liberty, way up at the top, in the torch. The building's doorman is a life-size bronze statue of the prior doorman, who worked here for fifty years before he was killed in a doorman-related incident.

The penthouse suite (where I kick up my feet) is ultra-intrauterine, with sky blue carpet and fluffy white pillow-clouds shaped like couches and recliners, wallpapered in dove feathers. Two wide-eyed windows afford a panoramic view of the Ferris wheel at

the Santa Monica Pier, which is currently on fire. Don't ask me why. All of our answers are mansions aflame. The whole world is burning in slow motion.

My refrigerator is stuffed with roadkill marinated in Dom Pérignon. My toilet is made of cholla cactus… my bathroom mirror is made of yellow misaligned teeth, closetful of fizzled neon Narnia. If you lift up the carpet in the far left corner of my bedroom, you'll find a knothole in the fleshwood floorboard where you can peek at the kaleidoscopic clockwork universe within me.

J. Martin Strangeweather is a poet, novelist, journalist, artist, teacher, philosopher, and thanatologist. He is also the originator of the eidetic afterlife hypothesis, and the chief executive prognosticator of the Santa Ana Literary Association.

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